

What does the term “confess” mean in the New Testament? A Series on the Meaning of Confess: Part 2

In the New Testament, the English term “confess” is translated from the Greek terms “homologeō” and “exomologeō.” In several instances, these Greek terms share the same meaning as the Old Testament Hebrew term for confess (yādâh) of “giving thanks and praising God for His mighty works.”

Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise (**homologeō**) to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. (Heb 13:15)

At that time Jesus said, “I praise (**exomologeō**) You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants.” (Matt 11:25)

At that very time He rejoiced greatly in the Holy Spirit, and said, “I praise (**exomologeō**) You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight.” (Luke 10:21)

However, the classical Greek meaning of “homologeō,” the non-religious meaning of the word during the first century AD, means “to say the same” and signifies an agreement or consent. It is used often in a legal context in which a man agrees with the statement of another such as conceding or confessing to something before a judge. In the same vein, “homologeō” is an act of agreement, promise or confession in a court or legal contract.

Scholars believed that the religious use of “homologeō” is derived from this secular and classical use in treatise, legal proceedings and court documents. This can be easily seen in the use of the noun form of “homologeō” with a meaning of “public acknowledgment, proclamation or declaration.” In the Bible, it is a public acknowledgment and declaration of commitment to God.

Because of the proof given by this ministry, they will glorify God for your obedience to your confession (**homologeō**) of the gospel of Christ and for the liberality of your contribution to them and to all, (2 Cor 9:13)

Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession (**homologeō**) in the presence of many witnesses. (1 Tim 6:12)

Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession (**homologeō**); (Heb 3:1)

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession (**homologeō**). (Heb 4:14)

Let us hold fast the confession (**homologeō**) of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; (Heb 10:23)

As with its noun form, the “-logeō” word group is used largely in the New Testament with this meaning of “confess openly,” “declare publicly” or “affirm visibly”; it is used by a person who faces a fact that he neither hides nor deny. The Believer acknowledges the historical fact of Jesus Christ and His work of atonement through crucifixion, and the truth of his sinful spiritual state; this admission claims Jesus’ promises and submits the Believer’s life to it.

It is usually applied to two types of responses to God: a confession of faith or the confession of sin.

What does the term “confess” mean in the Old Testament?
A Series on the Meaning of Confess: Part 2 (page 2)

When someone acknowledges and avows his fault honestly, he experiences God’s covenant relationship with the forgiveness of sins (1 John 1:9). Genuine confession reflects a genuine “change of mind” (repentance), and the public confession of sins means being set free from them (Rom 10:8-10; Matt 12:33-37).

Examples of a confession of faith

1. A personal confession to Jesus Christ.

In this example, Peter confesses to Jesus and recognizes that He is “the Christ” and “the Son of the Living God.” Peter’s confession is the essential basis of Christianity: Jesus Christ is the mediator of salvation whose truth is living, vital and available today. In the first century, this was in stark contrast to the dead deities of Greek society.

He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” (Matt 16:15-16)

And He continued by questioning them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered and said to Him, “You are the Christ.” (Mark 8:29)

And He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” And Peter answered and said, “The Christ of God.” (Luke 9:20)

2. A public confession before other people.

Before the world is aware of Jesus, John the Baptist call for repentance was based on the nearness of the kingdom of heaven. Under the Mosaic Covenant, the confession of sin was commanded (Lev 26:40-42); however, the Jews never used baptism on themselves other than to induct new proselytes. This passage shows the public declaration of one’s sinful state.

Then Jerusalem was going out to him, and all Judea and all the district around the Jordan; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins. (Matt 3:5-6)

In this example, Paul’s encourages Christians to make a “good confession” and mentions Jesus’ “good confession” before Pontius Pilate (Mark 15:1-5; John 18:33-38), which was acknowledging the truth and fact about Himself. Instead of defending Himself to Pilate, Jesus sought to reach the heart of Pilate (John 18:37).

But flee from these things, you man of God, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance *and* gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate, (1 Tim 6:11-13)

Christian persecution was common, and the risk of social alienation from confessing that Jesus is the Christ and Son of God was significant especially in small societies.

His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone confessed Him to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue. (John 9:22)

Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God. (John 12:42-43)

What does the term “confess” mean in the Old Testament?
A Series on the Meaning of Confess: Part 2 (page 3)

The gospels indicate that the public confession in the face of adversity is akin to a confession before God's judgment seat. It is worthwhile to note that a person's public acknowledgment and commitment to Jesus Christ is the basis for Jesus' own acknowledgment of that Believer to God.

Not everyone who says to Me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?” And then I will declare (**homologeō**) to them, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.” (Matt 7:21-23)

Therefore everyone who confesses (**homologeō**) Me before men, I will also confess (**homologeō**) him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven. (Matt 10:32-33)

And I say to you, everyone who confesses (**homologeō**) Me before men, the Son of Man will confess (**homologeō**) him also before the angels of God; but he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God. (Luke 12:8-9)

He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess (**homologeō**) his name before My Father and before His angels. (Rev 3:5)

References:

1. Brown C, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 1, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, (1979).
2. Brand C, Draper C and England A, eds., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, (1998).
3. Gaebelein F, ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vols. 8 and 9, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, (1992).